

THOMAS H. BENTON AND THE PACIFIC RAILROAD.

by

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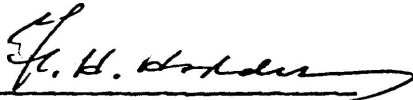
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A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "H. H. Woodson", is written over a horizontal line.

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CHAPTER I.

Introduction.

Colonel Thomas H. Benton, for thirty years a Senator from Missouri, has often been called "the Father of the Pacific Railroad." This is a misnomer, for others had advocated the project before he did, and Asa Whitney in 1845 introduced a scheme for building a railroad across the continent, which was before Congress for several years. However, to Benton is due credit for keeping the matter before Congress and the public for a number of years, and urging and urging and pushing it whenever an opportunity was offered. Although he died without seeing his scheme adopted, and another route was chosen for the first Pacific railroad, it came sometime sooner because of Benton's efforts than it would have without them.

Thomas H. Benton was born in North Carolina in 1782, but moved with his family, while still a small child, to Tennessee, then a wild and sparsely settled country. After he was grown, he went to St. Louis, which was his home during the remainder of his life, although he spent little time there. He was chosen one of the first senators from Missouri, and was re-elected four times, thus making his term one of the longest in the history of the country. He was defeated for a sixth term in 1851. Two

years later he was elected to the House as a representative of the first Missouri district of which St. Louis was a part. He remained in the House only one term. He never relinquished the idea of returning to the Senate, but was not able to accomplish this.

Benton was the leader of the Democrats in Missouri for many years, and dictated the policy of that party. His final defeat was the result of a split in the party, of which the two factions came to be called Bentonites and anti-Bentonites.

Benton's interest in the West, and in improvements in the new countries, was partly due to the fact that he had lived in both Tennessee and Missouri at a time when the country was undeveloped; and realized from experience the needs and the difficulties encountered by the people who left their homes to seek their fortunes in a new country. His sympathy was essentially with the West, and it was this part of the country which he thought would become the best section of the United States. His spirit was that of the pioneer, ever desiring to push forward and willing to encounter any obstacle in order to attain the end which he had in view.

CHAPTER II.

Early Western Interest.

In the early part of the nineteenth century, many people in the United States were speculating upon, and searching as had the European explorers of three and four hundred years before, for a shorter route to Asia, and particularly for a route through North America. At that time the Americans used the European route around Cape Horn or the Cape of Good Hope, a journey of some thirty thousand miles, attended with dangers from storms and pirates.

All of his life Benton held the idea that it would be possible to open communication across the United States and make it the channel of Asiatic trade, not only that from America to Asia, but also from Europe to Asia. The advantages in shortness of distance, lessening of dangers and the consequent cheapening of the cost of transporting articles would be so great that Europe would make use of the route, and the United States would profit thereby, as had every other country which had been the channel for this trade. This is the outstanding argument for all of his western projects, the acquisition of Oregon, opening of water communication, and last of all the construction of a railroad across the continent.

As early as 1819, he wrote a series of essays on the Asiatic trade parts of which were published in the

St. Louis Enquirer¹, and were revived and reprinted at the time of the Pacific Railroad agitation². In his speeches and letters on the latter subject, there is frequent reference to these earlier essays to prove that he had always been interested in trade with the northwest, and had been a pioneer in the movement of seeking a channel for that trade³.

In these essays, he traced the development and changes of the Asiatic trade from Ancient times to the nineteenth century: and the various attempts to find a northwest passage. For his route he relied upon the results of the Lewis and Clark expedition, which he believed had demonstrated that there was, except for a few portages, a water communication across the continent.

The route to Asia, which he proposed, consisted of a sea voyage across the North Pacific to the mouth of the Columbia, up the Columbia and Clark rivers as far as possible with a few easy portages, and thence by land carriage of six or eight days to headwaters of the Mis-

1. See Benton's letter to the Chicago River and Harbor Convention, 1847. Niles Register, vol. 72, p. 309.
2. Report No. 773 in Reports of Committees 29 Cong, 1 Sess (1846) Cong. Globe 29 Cong 1 Sess, p. 920.
3. National Intelligencer, June 9, 1853. Cong Globe, 30 Cong 2 Sess pp. 397, 399, 470.

souri River. This land carriage was to be through South Pass which, he declared, Lewis and Clark had missed, but which later explorations had shown was passable for "loaded wagons"⁴. The descent of the Missouri River to the Mississippi was the last stage. "Nothing is wanting in the West but a second Daniel Boone to lead the way and thousands of ardent spirits would immediately flock to the Columbia to develop its vast means of agriculture and commerce, and to open a direct trade between Asia and America"⁵.

It will be noticed that at this time he was convinced of the practicability of South Pass, the pass through the Rocky Mountains now used by the Union Pacific Railroad. He later declared this pass was entirely impracticable.

The motive behind all of Benton's efforts in regard to Oregon was to secure a route for Asiatic trade. As early as 1822 in a speech on the fur trade, he declared that the possession by the United States of the region, then occupied jointly by Great Britain and the United States was necessary to the fur trade. In this regard he cited Jefferson's instructions to Lewis and Clark as to "the practicability of taking the furs of the Rocky

4. Report 773 in Reports of Committees
29 Cong. 1 Sess p. 15.

5. Ibid, p.17.

Mountains directly to China upon the line of the Columbia river and the Pacific Ocean⁶.

In 1823, he introduced a resolution to enable the President to take possession of the Oregon territory. His principal argument was that if Great Britain retained control of the mouth of the Columbia, she would convert it into a naval base for the protection of her commerce, and the direct intercourse between Asia and the Valley of the Mississippi would be intercepted⁷.

Two years later, during the debate on a bill to occupy Oregon, Benton made a long speech in favor of such occupation. He stated many benefits to be derived, chief among them being; the opening of the fur trade, giving the United States a naval base on the Pacific and the opening of communication between the Mississippi Valley and the Pacific⁸.

On June 18, 1846, in the debate on the British Treaty in secret session, Benton said: "It will be for the American Government to make the Columbia and the Missouri the new line of that commerce with India which, since the time of the Phoenicians, has aggrandized every power that possessed it, and enriched every country

6. Annals of Congress, 17 Cong., 1 Sess. p.417.

7. Annals of Congress, 17 Cong., 2 Sess. 235, 246-251.

8. Congressional Debates, vol. I, 709-712 (1825)

through which it flowed."⁹ In a letter to the people of Oregon written a year later, he expressed the hope that he would "live long enough to see an emporium of Asiatic commerce at the mouth of your (Oregon's) river, and a stream of Asiatic trade pouring into the valley of the Mississippi through the Channel of Oregon¹⁰."

During the early part of Benton's service in the Senate, Congress was flooded with projects for internal improvements. This was one of the issues of the campaign of 1824¹¹. Although Benton believed that the Federal Government might improve waterways, even though they were within the bounds of a state¹², he maintained that it did not have power to construct other works of improvement especially roads within a state. When the bill for the improvement of the Cumberland road passed congress, Benton opposed it on the ground that it was an invasion of state rights and therefore unconstitutional¹³. He held this view consistently, for all of his later projects were for roads through territory belonging to the Federal Government¹⁴. He thought, however, that when the United States owned large tracts of

9. June 18, 1846 Cong. Globe, 29 Cong., 1 Sess. pp. 867-869.

10. March, 1847, Niles Register, vol. 72, p.148.

11. Benton: View I, p.22.

12. Letter to Chicago River and Harbor Com. Niles Register, vol. 72, p. 309; National Intelligencer June 17, 1847.

13. Benton: View I, p. 22.

14. See speech on Pac. Railroad Bill, 33 Cong., 2 Sess. p. 335.

territory, it was the duty of the Government to construct roads and thus facilitate settlement¹⁵.

One of Bentons early projects which he succeeded in getting through congress was for a road from the Missouri frontier to New Mexico. At that time, in 1825, parties of traders frequently made the trip to Santa Fe and a region with large resources was opened to the trade of the United States. The trip was through Indian territory, and there was constant danger of attacks by the Indian tribes. Benton urged upon Congress the commercial reasons for opening the road with the additional one that it would open a channel of communication between the United States and Mexico, and draw the two nations closer together. The road was to be through the lands of the tribes within our border to the juncture of the Arkansas river and the foreign boundary of 1819; from there, with the consent of Mexico, it was to go to Santa Fe¹⁶.

The bill passed both houses and was signed by the President, but the United States never constructed the road.

15. Speech on Road in Ark. Terr.: Benton Abridgment of the Debates of Congress vol. IX. p. 279.
16. Jan. 3, 1825, Benton presented a paper from a trader who had made the trip. Benton: Abridgment VIII, 106 Presented bill for road from Com. on Ind. Affairs Ib. p. 126. Spdke in favor of bill, Cong. Debates I, 341-348.

CHAPTER III.
Railroad Activity in the Senate.

In regard to railroads, Benton's attitude changed from violent opposition to just as ardent patronage. The fact that he was a man prominent in the affairs of the state and of the nation kept his various projects constantly before the public.

He was the leader of the Democratic party in Missouri, and through his influence the Missouri Legislature for several years voted down all bills for aid to railroad construction¹⁷. It was a characteristic of Benton's nature that when he opposed a measure he used every means in his power to defeat it.

One of the reasons for this opposition lay in his interest in, and partiality toward water transportation. It was hard for him to give up the idea of transporting all goods by rivers and canals, especially of making the Mississippi the avenue of all western commerce, and New Orleans the trade center. In the speech on Foote's resolution we find these statements:

"My idea is this: that the great and bulky productions of the West will follow the course of the waters and float down the rivers to New Orleans."

"No, sir, the West is not going to give up their

17. Darby, J. F. : Personal Recollections,
p. 181.

steamboats - their ships not of the desert, but of noble rivers. They are not going to abandon the Mississippi mare nostrum - our sea - for the comfort of scaling the Alleghany Mountains with hogsheads of tobacco, barrels of whiskey, pork and flour, bales of hemp and coops of chickens, and turkeys on their backs¹⁸."

The railroad agitation came after Benton had passed his youth. His ideas were well formed, and it was much harder for him to adopt new ones than it would have been had he been younger¹⁹. His sincerity in the matter cannot be questioned; and is attested by the fact that, when he became convinced of their advantages, he was heartily in favor of them.

In 1836, he spoke at length on the disadvantages of railroads in the debate on a bill to authorize contracts for carrying the mails upon them²⁰. The arguments advanced seem absurd to us now, but were no doubt seriously considered at the time. Indeed, there were grounds for objection when the railroads were first developed and the Twentieth Century Limited was a thing undreamed of. Benton urged the facts that railroads travelled only from one great point to another, passing

18. Congressional Debates, 21 Congress
1 Sess. pp. 115-116.

19. Mergs: Life of Benton, p. 415.

20. Cong. Globe, 24 Cong. 1 Sess. pp. 373.

by the smaller places without stopping long enough for the purposes of the mail; that if they should stop frequently they would not travel much faster than the ordinary mail, and that delays were frequent and vexatious. To his mind these were insurmountable barriers to the adoption of the scheme.

In 1843, the Chinese ports were opened to trade, and interest in communication with the west was greatly increased. Men began to seriously consider the idea of extending the Railroad system, and by this means, bringing the Asiatic trade across the United States. Benton had, in the meantime come to realize the importance of the railroads in the development of the country. In 1844, in a speech in St. Louis, he predicted that men then grown would see the Asiatic commerce crossing the North Pacific Ocean, and then coming by rail across the Rocky Mountains and the Western plains: and that St. Louis would find communication with China as easy as with Europe²¹.

Early in 1845, the first Pacific railroad project appeared in Congress when Asa Whitney petitioned for a grant of land sixty miles wide from Lake Michigan to the Pacific for the purpose of constructing a railroad. His

21. Bancroft: History of Oregon, vol. I.
p. 510, N., from Oregon Spectator,
Sept 17, 1846.

plan was widely agitated from this time until 1849. February 24, 1846, it was referred to the Committee on Public Lands in the Senate of which Senator Breese of Illinois was chairman²². The Committee reported favorably²³ Senator Benton immediately rose and objected to the bill. He ridiculed the idea of giving ninety million acres of land for the construction of a railroad three or four thousand miles in length, through a wilderness and over high mountains; and said that whenever the scheme came up he would oppose it²⁴. The report was ordered printed, but without the map²⁵, which Mr. M. W. Fuller says, in his introduction to Gen. Brees's Early History of Illinois, was significant as it delineated the route subsequently pursued²⁶.

The acquisition of Oregon in 1846 increased interest in Whitney's plan, for it gave the United States the mouth of the Columbia and an outlet to the Pacific. The necessity of some means of rapid communication in the development of the country and bringing it to the Union made people more disposed to favor the plan. The north-

22. Cong. Globe, 29 Cong. 1 Sess., p. 414.

23 Cong. Globe, 29 Cong. 1 Sess., pp. 1171.
for report in full see Breese: Early History of Ill. pp. 303-366.

24. Cong. Globe, 29 Cong. 1 Sess. p. 1171.

25. Same as 23.

26. Breese: Early History of Illinois, p. 36.

ern location of the route did not please the South, but it had nothing better to offer²⁷.

In 1848, the bill was again before Congress, but Colonel Benton, who opposed the land grant, and the adoption of a scheme without surveys and explorations, was successful in tabling it²⁸.

In the next session of Congress, Benton, as chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs, reported and pressed a bill giving the Panama Railroad a ninety-nine year monopoly of the carrying of mails and supplies across the Isthmus. He advocated this as a temporary route only, for he favored no permanent road outside of our own country, and expressed the hope that there would soon be a railroad across the continent with ⁱⁿ the territory of the United States²⁹.

Benton's opposition to the Whitney measure, in the face of the fact that he favored a railroad to the Pacific, needs some explanation. His opposition to the means of construction has already been mentioned. He characterized it as a great stock-jobbing business, designed to be sold in the markets of Europe and America³⁰.

One of his arguments against the route proposed for

27. R. S. Cotterill: National R. R. Convention in St. Louis, 1849, Missouri Historical Review vol. XII. p. 203.

28. Cong. Globe, 30 Cong., 1 Sess. p. 1011, 1848.

29. Cong. Globe, 30 Cong., 2 Sess. pp. 40, 50, 399.

30. Ibid. p. 472.

the road was that it was too far north to be kept open in the winter³¹. The line crossed the Rocky Mountains through the South Pass, which up to this time Benton had favored . In all of his communications upon the subject, he had maintained that the South Pass route, "on the line of the Great Platte" must forever be the land travelling route³²."

The real reason for Benton's opposition to the route lay in the fact that it left the state of Missouri far to the South. It was natural that people should desire that a project of such magnitude, with the accompanying advantages, should pass through their own state. The sections of the union were each striving for the route which would be of the greatest local benefit³³. St. Louis was at that time a rapidly growing city, and if it could secure the eastern terminal of the road, its growth would be further hastened. Representative Robinson of Indiana declared in the House, in 1850, that Benton and certain Missouri representatives would not have opposed the plan if it had made St. Louis the east-

31. R. S. Cotterill: Early Pacific R. R. Agitation, Mississippi Valley Historical Review, vol. 5, p. 399.

32. Letter of April 27, 1846, Rep. 773 in Reports of Committees, 29 Cong., 1 Sess.

33. John M. Niles, Railroad to the Pacific, Hunts Merchant Magazine, vol. 21, p. 76. Davis: The Union Pacific Railway, p. 31.

ern terminus or had"afforded any margin for presidential capital³⁴." A still stronger hint of political motives is found in an editorial in the American Railroad Journal which stated that "the Pacific Railway which would realize his (Benton's) highest conception of usefulness or greatness, would, after running directly through the state of Missouri, make a sudden detour and find its western terminus at Washington³⁵."

The acquisition of New Mexico and California in 1848, not only added a large extent of territory to the United States, but vastly increased interest in the Pacific Railroad. It made its construction in the near future certain, and indeed almost a necessity. It gave to the South a possible route to the Pacific, and also several places on the coast which would be suitable as the western terminus of the road. From this time rival routes multiplied rapidly.

January 29, 1849, Niles of Connecticut succeeded in getting the bill favoring the Whitney plan before the Senate, but was unsuccessful in the attempt to secure its passage. Finally, on February 7³⁷, Benton introduced a rival bill, which marks the real beginning of his railroad activity. From this time he labored unceasing-

34. Cong. Globe 31 Cong. 1 Sess. app. p. 333 1850.

35. American R. R. Journal, vol. 22, p. 711.

36. Cong. Globe, 30 Cong. 2 Sess. p. 380.

37. Cong. Globe, 30 Cong. 2 Sess. pp. 470-476.

ly to secure the adoption of his project.

The bill³⁸ provided that seventy-five per cent of the proceeds of the public land sales in California, and fifty per cent from the sales of all other public lands in the United States should be set aside for the construction of a "National central highway from the Mississippi river to the Pacific Ocean." The main road was to be from St. Louis to San Francisco, with a branch to Oregon. A tract of land one mile wide was to be reserved for the main road, and one thousand feet for the branch. On this were to be constructed railroads, telegraph lines and "a plain old English road, such as we have been accustomed to all our lives - a road on which the farmer in his wagon or carriage, on horse or on foot, may travel without fear and without tax, with none to run over him or make him jump out of the way." Iron railways were to be constructed when practicalbe, and macadamized or other roads at other places. As opposition to Benton's route developed, this was used as an argument against it; to show that he did not feel his route entirely suitable for a railroad.

Upon completion of the track, the use was to be let to companies or individuals. Settlements should be encouraged by donations of land to settlers, and military stations located along the route for protection and

38. Ibid, p. 473.

support. The bill provided for an appropriation of \$30,000 to enable the President to lay information before Congress, and \$100,000 to treat with the Indians along the route.

In his introductory speech, Benton urged the necessity of constructing the road at this time when there would be no question of interference with private or state rights, for the whole country through which it passed was in a territorial condition. He favored a central route, because it was most national in character would accomodate the greatest number of people and admitted of branches to right and left. Beginning at the Bay of San Francisco, the route followed the thirty-ninth parallel most of the way to St. Louis, where other roads would be met, being as nearly as possible a straight line.

As authority that there were suitable passes on this line, Benton cited J. C. Fremont, who was then engaged on his fourth expedition. When it should be completed, Benton felt sure they would have "all the information necessary to fix upon the details of intermediate distance." On a previous expedition, Fremont had explored South Pass and found it an easy one, but had later explored three others still farther South: the first of these in north latitude $41^{\circ} 20'$; the second from the

headwaters of the Great Platte to the head waters of the Grand river fork of the Colorado of the west; and the third at the head of the South Fork of the Platte.

As for the means of construction, he characterized all other schemes as incompetent; for the task of building a railroad through sixteen hundred miles of territory occupied by savages required the authority of a nation to complete it, and to extinguish the Indian title.

The bill was referred to the committee of Military Affairs of which Benton was chairman³⁹. He reported back a bill for the road⁴⁰, but it was never passed.

The people of Missouri were enthusiastic in their support of the bill. On February 20, a public meeting at St. Louis, called to consider the proposition, adopted resolutions endorsing it, and pledging to Benton the support and approbation of the meeting. Additional resolutions tendered to J. C. Fremont the thanks of the meeting for his explorations in the Rocky and California Mountains, by which they were furnished with knowledge of the passes, and were able to judge the practicability of constructing a railroad over them from St. Louis to California⁴¹.

The Missouri legislature presented a memorial to

39. Cong. Globe, 30 Cong. 2 Sess. p. 473.

40. Ibid, p. 625.

41. National Intelligencer, March 10, 1849.

Congress regarding the proposed road, and also passed an act giving to the United States the right of way through the state for it⁴².

In May of this same year, a committee of St. Louis citizens invited Col. Benton to a public dinner in his honor. In declining, Benton said that he wanted a larger audience before which to explain his plan; that the people had led the government through the wilderness to California and Oregon, and it was time for the government to give them a road to the territory which they had added to the Republic⁴³.

John C. Fremont, upon whose reports Benton relied for the geography of the country, was his son-in-law, and one of the most persistent of our western explorers. He led five exploring expeditions to the West - three under government supervision, and two private ones.

The first expedition was undertaken in 1842 to explore the country between the Missouri river and the Rocky Mountains; and especially South Pass, which was on the Oregon trail, and used by all of the emigrants to Oregon⁴⁴.

The next year, he undertook a second expedition

42. J. ^W~~M~~. Million: State Aid to Railways in Missouri.

43. National Intelligencer, May 22, 1849.

44. Meigs: Life of Benton, p. 284: Benton: View II, p. 478.

during which he went as far as the tidewater region of the Columbia, and thence to California. He explored the Salt Lake Country and the Sierra Nevadas, and several new passes in the Rocky Mountains⁴⁵.

The third^{and} most important expedition was begun in May, 1845. The instructions have never been made public, and as a result the entire purpose is largely a matter of conjecture. Fremont, in his Memoirs, says that the purposes were to explore the central portion of the Rocky Mountains, to complete the examination of the Great Salt Lake region, and to ascertain the lines of communication through the Cascade Mountains to the ocean⁴⁶. One of the principal objects was to survey the most practicable route from the United States to the Pacific Ocean⁴⁷. There seems little basis for the assertion made by a recent writer⁴⁸ that this was with a view to finding the best route for a Pacific railroad⁴⁹. This assumption is based largely on a declaration to that ef-

45. Benton: View II, pp. 579-580.

46. Fremont: Memoirs, vol. I, p. 422.

47. Bigelow: Life of Fremont, p. 123.
Letter from Thomas I. Larkin, U. S.
Consul at Monterey to Manuel Castro
prefect of the District. Niles Reg.
171, p. 188.

48. Shafer: The Pacific Slope and Alaska,
p. 243.

49. Prof. F. H. Hodder: Rev. of Shafer: Hist.
of the Pacific Northwest, Amer. Histor-
ical Review. vol. XXIII, pp. 907-908.

fect made by Fremont in 1884 - almost forty years after the expedition, and at a time when the Pacific railroad was in successful operation. None of the discussions or Fremont's correspondence at the time of the expedition give any hint of his purpose. The territory explored was largely Mexican, and Benton, who was a supporter of Fremont in all of his explorations, was very much opposed to a railroad on foreign soil⁵⁰. It seems plausible to think that Fremont's statement as to this object, made when he was an old man, many years after the event had taken place, was colored by the intervening events.

Fremont went first to California, then to Oregon, but later returned to California, where he put himself at the head of the Americans, and was instrumental in the overthrow of Mexican authority⁵¹.

Upon his return from California, he was tried by court martial for insubordination. He was acquitted, but resigned from the army and soon afterwards started upon his fourth expedition. This time it was entirely at his own expense⁵² and with a railroad object in view⁵³.

50. Speech on Panama Railroad, Cong. Globe
30 Cong. 2 Sess., p. 399.

51. Benton: View, II, p. 688.

52. Benton: View II, 719.

53. Footnote to Fremont's letter to his
family: National Intelligencer, April
14, 1849.

He was engaged upon this expedition at the time Benton introduced his bill for a national central highway to the Pacific. It was undertaken in the winter, the party met with many hardships and the expedition ended in failure.

October 15, 1849, a national railroad convention met in St. Louis. Stephen A. Douglas, who headed the Illinois delegation was chosen President⁵⁴. He later resigned to take part in the debates⁵⁵. The convention was largely local in character, most of the delegates being from the central states, particularly Missouri, Illinois and Kentucky.

The second morning of the convention, Benton was called for, and spoke long and eloquently upon the subject of a railroad to the Pacific⁵⁶. Although he said it was not the duty of the convention to decide upon the route for the road, he immediately began to point out the advantages offered by his preferred route in directness, practicability because of the even profile, the fertility of the country, and the ease with which branch roads could be made to New Mexico and Oregon. He read several letters from Fremont to prove the superiority of the route.

54. American R. R. Journal, Vol. 22, p. 663.

55. Cotterill: Nat'l R.R. Convention in St. Louis 1849. Missouri Historical Rev. V. XII, p. 203.

56. National Intelligencer, Nov. 3, 1849. Extracts in American R.R. Jour. Vol. 22, p. 691.

Sometime before the convention, a mass meeting of St. Louis citizens had appointed a committee to collect information for the convention. This committee prepared a report in favor of the South Pass, which declared that Fremont had asserted that there was no practicable pass south of it⁵⁷. This statement was repeated in an article by Loughborough, editor of the Western Journal⁵⁸. Benton spent sometime in disproving this statement, for he said that Fremont had found and examined many better ones, and nearer a true line than the South Pass; but declared in favor of none until he could examine a line still further south, with a pass at the head of the del Norte. This was the line which Benton advocated for the road.

The following burst of oratory brought the speech to a climax:

"Let us rise to the grandeur of the occasion. Let us complete the great design of Columbus by putting Europe and Asia into communication and that to our advantage, through the heart of our country. Let us give to his ships, converted into cars, a continued course, unknown to all former times.----- Let us beseech the Na-

57. The Western Journal, vol. 2, p. 368.

58. Ibid, p. 395.

tional Legislature to build the great road upon the great National line which unites Europe and Asia - San Francisco at one end, St. Louis in the middle, the national metropolis and great commercial emporium at the other; and which shall be adorned with its crowning honor - the colossal statue of the great Columbus - whose design it accomplishes, hewn from a granite mass of a peak of the Rocky mountain itself the pedestal and the statue a part of the mountain - pointing with outstretched arm to the western horizon and saying to the flying passengers 'There is the East, there is India'". ⁵⁹

The speech precipitated a bitter fight between Benton and the advocates of the South Pass route, especially certain members of the Missouri delegation. The quarrel among the Missouri representatives became so violent that it threatened to break up the convention ⁶⁰. Among the advocates of the South Pass route were Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, J. W. Loughborough of St. Louis, and William Gilpin of Independence, Missouri. Gilpin was a former friend and supporter of Benton, but he still maintained that the road through the South Pass was the only practicable one to the states on the Pacific ⁶¹. Douglas

59. National Intelligencer, Nov. 3, 1849.

60. American R. R. Journal, vol. 22, p. 711.

61. Letter of Gilpin dated Jan. 8, 1849 in National Intelligencer, Feb. 17, 1849.

resigned the presidency of the convention in order to take part in the debates. In the end, resolutions favoring the South Pass route were adopted⁶². Nothing was said of the eastern terminus, but it was assumed that it would be in either Iowa or Illinois⁶³.

The convention adjourned to meet again in Philadelphia in April of the next year.

A month later, a mass meeting held at Independence, Missouri, adopted resolutions endorsing the proceeding of the St. Louis convention, and asserting their belief in the importance to the people of the Mississippi Valley of the establishment of railroad communication with the Pacific⁶⁴. Gilpin spoke at this meeting and was chairman of the committee which drew up the resolutions. In his address, he said that there existed no railroad route between the South Pass and the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.⁶⁵

62. The Pacific Railway Con. in St. Louis, Western Jour. Nov. 1849: Cotterill, Nat'l. R. R. R. R. Con. in St. Louis, Missouri Hist. Rev. vol. XII, p. 203.

63. Hodder: Kansas Nebraska Act. Proceedings of the St. Hist. Soc. of Wis. 1912, p. 71.

64. Wm. Gilpin: The Central Gold Region pp. 180-182

65. Ibid, pp. 145-180.

At the next session of Congress, the Vice President presented in the Senate a memorial from St. Louis convention asking for the construction of the road. This was tabled on the motion of Senator Benton⁶⁶.

The people of St. Louis were enthusiastic over Benton's part in the convention, and because of it a statue to him was erected May 27, 1868 in Lafayette Park⁶⁷. An incident is told of Senator Brewster who said that when he was advocating a Pacific Railroad, the strongest opposition came from Colonel Benton, who later had a monumental statue erected in his honor for advocating the measure at last⁶⁸.

Benton's sudden change from opposition to promotion of a Pacific Railroad caused great surprise at the time. He had for so long advocated communicating with Pacific by means of the Missouri and Columbia rivers, that people could not understand the abandonment of his hobby in favor of a railroad across the continent⁶⁹.

Two explanations may be found for the change of route. Benton had early advocated the South Pass as the best one through which to communicate with the Paci-

66. Cong. Globe, 31 Cong, 1 Sess., p. 97.

67. Davis and Durrie: An Illustrated History of Missouri, pp. 201-202. Darby: Personal Recollections, p. 183.

68. Darby: same as (67)

69. J. M. Niles R.R. To the Pacific Hunts Merchant Mag. v. 21, p. 73. Loughborough: The Pacific R. R. Western Jour. v. 2, p. 403.

fic, while now he was bitterly opposed to it. The principal reason for this change was found in the explorations of Fremont. Benton in his St. Louis speech said that he had favored the South Pass until Fremont discovered others farther south. The second explanation was found in the same speech. The acquisition of additional territory made another route necessary, for at first Oregon was the only Pacific possession of the United States, and connection with the Columbia the prime object⁷⁰.

That Benton's plan should meet with opposition was natural. The first objections raised were to the plan of building rather than to the route, for knowledge of the West was meager, and most people considered Fremont the best authority upon the geography of the country.

One of the chief objections to the plan was that the sale of public lands could not possibly provide money enough to build the road. Loughborough estimated that they would provide at best, little over \$1,500,000 a year⁷¹. The most serious objection was to the increase of government patronage through the building of the road; and to the frauds and to corruption which were apt to arise in a gov-

70. National Intelligencer, Nov. 3, 1849.

Bancroft: Hist of Calif., vol. VII, p. 506.

71. Niles: R. R. To the Pacific, Hunts Merchant Magazine vol. 21, p. 78. Loughborough: The Pacific R. R., Western Jour. Vol. II, p. 427.

ernment project of such stupendous proportions⁷². Senator Niles went so far as to say that the people would become so disgusted with this that they would in a few years abandon it entirely.

At the next session of Congress, Benton gave notice of intention to introduce a bill for a railroad from St. Louis to San Francisco⁷³, but for some reason it was never brought before congress. The proposed bill as published⁷⁴ contained the essential elements of the earlier bill. Two more branches were added; to Santa Fe and the Great Salt Lake Settlement, and no definite portion of the proceeds of land sales was set aside. They were to be applied as far as needed, and anticipated by hypothecation, if necessary.

The Philadelphia Convention met April 1, 1850. The outstanding feature was a letter from Fremont upon the central route⁷⁵. The route which he proposed began at the mouth of the Kansas river, and followed the valley of this river for three or four hundred miles. About one hundred miles from the foot of the mountains it struck the Arkan-

- 72. Niles: Hunts Merchant Magazine vol. 21, p. 78.
Intercommunication between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, De Bow's Commercial Rev., V.VII, p. 31. Speech of V. R. Stevens of R. I. in Philadelphia Con. American R. R. Jour. V. 23, p. 229.
- 73. Mar. 28, 1850, Cong. Globe, 31 Cong. 1 Sess. p. 97
- 74. National Intelligencer. Apr. 2, 1850.
- 75. Nat'l Intell. Apr. 9: 1850.

Sas and followed it and the Huerfano, a branch of the Arkansas to what Fremont described as a "remarkable" pass in the mountains. It passed through the mountains and emerged in the open valley of the del Norte. From this point to the Great Basin, he had not examined the route, but reliable reports from Indians and trappers convinced him that it was practicable for a road. From the Wasatch mountains through the Great Basin to the Sierra Nevada, and thence to the Bay of San Francisco three routes were open: First, the line of the Humboldt river, which presented several passes, but was not direct; second, through Walker's Pass near the head of the Valley of the San Joaquin; third, a direct line which seemed preferable to Fremont. It struck the Sierras near the center, but he was sure of numerous passes. As for the entire route, he was sure that there was no northern route comparable to it, and none south of it in the territory of the United States.

The convention did little in advance of that done by the St. Louis Convention except to urge upon Congress the necessity of speedy action upon the subject⁷⁶.

From this time the central route came to be known as the Benton-Fremont route, and both of them labored unremittingly for its adoption as the route for the road which

76. American R. R. Jour., Vol. 23, p. 233.

had now become a certainty.

December 16, 1850, Benton again introduced a bill for a central national highway⁷⁷. It was at this time that he made his famous "buffalo trails" speech, asserting that wild animals choose the easiest route and the best passes, and "science now makes her improved roads exactly where the buffalo's foot first marked the trail." Animals, hunters and traders had used the proposed route, and demonstrated its practicability.

The route was up the main branch of the Kansas, the upper Arkansas, and the Huerfano, through Utah Pass, out at the head of the del Norte, through Roubidoux's Pass and thence across the Valley of the Upper Colorado, and through the Great Basin, crossing the Sierra Nevada near its middle.

As a means of construction, the bill set aside a portion of the public lands one hundred miles wide from the frontier of Missouri to the Pacific, and fifty miles wide for the branches to Santa Fe, Salt Lake City and Oregon, to provide means for constructing the road. In addition, that part of the revenue from customs and public lands in California, Oregon, Utah and New Mexico not used in those districts was to be similarly applied. Like Benton's other plans, one mile was reserved for the right of way on the main line, and one thousand feet on the

77. Cong. Globe, 31 Cong. 2 Sess. p. 56

branches to provide for different systems of roads and telegraph lines. A common road and a railroad were to be commenced as soon as surveys were completed, the common road to be finished in one year and the railroad in ten years.

The bill was referred to the committee on roads and canals⁷⁸.

The year before, the Missouri Pacific Railroad Company had been organized to construct a railroad in Missouri west from St. Louis. Benton was heartily in favor of it, because it would connect at the mouth of the Kansas river with his proposed central route⁷⁹. He introduced in the Senate a bill for the grant of public lands in Missouri to aid in its construction, but did not secure its passage⁸⁰.

Benton was invited to be present at the commencement of work on the road, but was unable to be there. He expressed his regret in a letter to the directors of the company, in which he assured them of the success of the road because of its "centrality." He expressed confidence that the whole road to the Pacific would eventually be made by private companies if not by the Government⁸¹. This

78. Ibid, p. 58.

79. American R. R. Jour. vol. 23, p. 328.

80. Cong. Globe, 31 Cong., 1 Sess., pp. 1111-1112.

81. National Intelligencer, Aug. 21, 1851.
American R. R. Jour. vol. 24, p. 550

is the first hint which we have of doubt on Benton's part that the government might possibly not build the road.

Chapter IV.

Later Railroad Activity.

In January 1851, Benton was defeated for re-election to the Senate, by Henry S. Geyer⁸². Benton was very much embittered by this defeat. It was the first time for thirty years that he had not been in the center of the government's railroad activity. In a letter to the people of Missouri, in September 1852, he wrote: "I have had no national platform since I was sold out of the Senate, but I retain the privilege of local address⁸³."

This letter was to warn the people against the agitation in favor of a railroad by the Tehuantepec route, which was current at the time. Benton argued that it was antagonistic to the inland American route, and furthermore, that the government had no right to build the road, for the grant was illegal.

In November 1852, he was elected to the House by a St. Louis district⁸⁴. In 1853, he began a campaign for election to the Senate to succeed Atchison, whose term expired March 1855, upon the platform of a Missouri terminal for the Pacific railroad, but was unsuccessful⁸⁵.

82. Goodspeed: The Province and the States, v.IV, p. 107.

83. National Intelligencer, Sept. 21, 1852.

84. Mergs: Life of Thomas Hart Benton, p. 423.

85. Hodder: The Kansas-Nebraska Act, p. 74.

86. Goodspeed: Province and the States, p. 126.

In fact, the Missouri legislature failed to agree, and^{86.} the State had only one member in the Senate for two years.

In 1853, he wrote a letter to the Missourians, in which he explained at length and urged the advantages of his railroad plan. He showed that the one road from San Francisco would meet many roads at St. Louis, and thus connect with all parts of the Union.⁸⁷

Benton was very much interested in the settlement of the west because of its connection with the location, construction and support of the Great Central Railroad. According to his view, three-fourths of the country between the frontier of Missouri and the Rocky Mountains was free from Indian title, and suitable in every way to settlement⁸⁸. It is interesting to note in this connection that all of Benton's bills provided for the extinguishing of the ~~Indian~~ titles along the route. Not all railroad agitators were so scrupulous in this regard.

Benton was, at this time, rather intimately connected with another western expedition - that of Edward F. Beale, Superintendent of Indian affairs for California. On the last day of the session, Congress had passed an

86. Goodspeed: The Province and the State, p. 126.

87. Nat'L. Intelligencer, June 7, 1853. Brief resume in Railroad Record vol. I, p. 87.

88. Letter of May, 1853 to Colo. County Citizens. Ray: Repeal of the Missouri Compromise, p. 116.

act making an appropriation for the survey of routes to the Pacific⁸⁹. Benton, immediately wrote to Fremont to return and ask to be employed on the survey of the central route from the head of the del Norte. In a letter⁹⁰ to Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, Benton and Beale proposed that the latter be permitted to enter immediately upon the duty to be taken by Fremont if he returned for the purpose. They proposed to examine that part of the route which Fremont had not explored - from the mouth of the Huerfano, on the upper Arkansas, to Los Vegas de Santa Clara. They asked for a detachment of troops or at least a military escort. Benton added that Beale's acquaintance with California and the Indians made him extremely well-fitted for the exploration. Secretary Davis refused to commit himself in his reply to this letter⁹¹. However, neither Fremont nor Beale were members of the Government exploring parties.

On the same day that it passed the act providing for the Pacific railroad surveys, Congress passed another act appropriating \$250,000 for the betterment of the Indians in California and for five Indian reservations in Califor-

89. Mar. 3, 1853, Cong. Globe 32 Cong., 2 Sess., p.352

90. Letter of Mar. 16, 1853, Nat'l Intelligencer,
April 16, 1853.

91. Same as (90)

nia, or the territories of Utah and New Mexico.⁹² Beale was instructed to start at once to his superintendency, and select the land most suitable for the reservations. He was also to examine the territories of New Mexico and Utah where they were contiguous to California.⁹³

Beale left Westport on May 15, and arrived in Los Angeles, California, August 22, having travelled 1,842 miles in forty-nine days, travelling time.⁹⁴

Mr Harris Heap, a member of the party, kept a detailed journal⁹⁵ during the trip, and both he and Beale wrote frequently to Benton, keeping him informed as to their progress.⁹⁶ Both the letters and the journal show that Benton and Beale had mapped out a route which the party was to follow.⁹⁷

The party went through the eastern branch of the

92. Cong. Globe, 32 Cong., 2 Sess. App. p. 359.

93. Heap's Jour. Nat'l Intelligencer, Nov. 26, 1853.

94. Heap's letter dated Los Angeles, Aug. 26, Nat'l. Intelligencer, Oct. 13, 1853.

95. National Intelligence, Nov. 26, 29: Dec. 1, 3, 6, 8, 13.

96. Nat'l Intell. July 28, Aug. 2, Oct. 13, 1853.

97. Letter from Heap to Benton, Aug. 26, 1853, Nat'l. Intell. Oct. 13. Letter from Benton to Nat'l. Intelligencer, National Intelligencer, Oct. 13.

Rocky Mountains by means of the Sangre de Christo Pass and crossed the continental divide in the middle of Corcheltopa Pass. It was an old buffalo trail, which proved, to Benton's satisfaction at least, that it was the best route and that the surrounding country was desirable. It was the question of passes which seemed most important to Benton⁹⁸. He felt that if a suitable pass could be found through the mountains, the rest of the route would be easy to map out. Later expeditions found the Coochetopa Pass a difficult one,⁹⁹ but Benton never abandoned it.

The Beale party followed the route as mapped out by Benton to the edge of the Mohave desert, where because of the condition of the party, they were forced to abandon their intention of entering California through Walkers Pass, and thus cutting off an arm of the old Spanish trail. There were two good passes, Walkers and the Tejon, through which the Valley was usually entered¹⁰⁰.

The results of the expedition were highly gratifying to Benton, as they gave him additional evidence upon which to base his assertions as to the practicability

98. Letter from Benton to the Amer. Jour.: Jour. vol. 26, p. 588.

99. Reports of Committees of House of Rep. 34 Cong., 1 Sess., vol. 3, p. 26.

100.-102. Nat'l Intelligencer, Oct. 13, 1853.

of the general course. They reported that they found the route generally level, with no obstacles which could not be easily overcome, and excellent passes through all mountains without deviating from the direct course¹⁰¹.

Although Beale was prevented from examining the short cut through Walker's Pass, Benton attempted to supply this deficiency through a communication from Rev. J. W. Brin who had travelled over that part of the route and found it good. It avoided the desert which the Spanish trail encountered¹⁰².

His view as to the practicability and superiority over the old trail of the entire route was confirmed by letters from various immigrants who had made the trip, and by a railroad meeting held in Taos, New Mexico¹⁰³, Bancroft says that Benton and Fremont were deceived by this meeting, as the leaders knew that the route was not good, but owned land along it and were therefore personally interested¹⁰⁴.

The government exploring party for the central route organized under the Act of Congress, was headed by Captain Gunnison. The explorations were conducted during the summer of 1853, but were brought to a sudden end in October, when Captain Gunnison and several members of the party were

103. Nat'l Intelligencer, July 2, 1853

Ibid, Nov. 8, 1853.

104. Bancroft:

killed by Indians in Utah territory. A report of the results was submitted by Lieut. E. G. Beckwith, assistant engineer. They found the line impracticable for a railroad, and declared it unworthy of further exploration. The country through which it passes was arid and unsuited to agriculture. There was little timber, and in places no rocks for building a railroad. Many bridges and tunnels would be needed, making it a very expensive task. Coochetopa Pass was found to be 10,032 feet above sea level, and would require a tunnel and approach two miles in length. Reports showed that Sangre de Christo Pass and several other passes on the route were almost impassable in winter because of the snow¹⁰⁵.

Benton seems not to have been discouraged by the results of this exploration. In fact, he paid very little attention to it. He probably referred to it in a speech sometime later when he said that for the description of the country, he relied upon Fremont whose exploration was "directed by no authority connected with no company, swayed by no interest, - wholly guided by himself, and solely directed to the public good"¹⁰⁶.

105. Senate Document #78, 33 Cong. 2 Sess., (vol. 13, pt. 2) pp. 9-128. Summary of results, pp. 79-88.

106. Address of Mr. Benton of Missouri before the Boston Mercantile Library Association, p. 16.

October 15, 1853, Fremont started on his fifth expedition, financed by himself and Benton¹⁰⁷. His purpose¹⁰⁸ was to examine the Coochetopa Pass and the central route, and particularly the winter condition of the country and the extent to which snow would be an obstruction to a railroad¹⁰⁹.

During the journey, Fremont wrote frequently to Benton, endorsing all that had been said regarding the practicability of the route, and especially emphasizing the fact that winter could form no impediment¹¹⁰. Upon his return, he published an extended report of the expedition¹¹¹.

In this report, he showed that three-fourths of the distance travelled was between the thirty-eighth and thirty-ninth parallels, and that the line was so direct that from the mouth of the Kansas river to the Valley of Parowan, they travelled only 1,550 miles over an air-line distance of about 1,300 miles. Although he says that snow will not interfere, at one time they were able to make only ten miles in ten days; and falling snow and the

107. Nat'l Intelligencer, Oct. 25, 1853.

108. Ibid, Sept. 20, 1853.

109. Upham: Fremont, p. 327.

110. Nat'l Intelligencer, Mar. 18, Apr. 13, 1854.

111. Ibid, June 15, 1854.

destitute condition of the party would not allow them to make minute examinations in the mountains. He agreed with others as to the excellence of Coochetopa Pass, but the country was so enveloped with clouds, and the air full of snow, that exploring was dangerous and difficult.

The publication of Fremont's report brought forth a great deal of criticism as to the route, and also the accuracy of his reports of the condition of the country. He had reported the country along the Arkansas fertile and abounding in coal, grass, wood and water, and with a mild climate, while others declared it treeless and barren. Furthermore, it was hard for people to see how the climate could be mild, with short winters at such a high elevation. It was charged that he went too fast for actual measurements, and the whole account was denounced as "the argument of a partisan instead of an impartial record of observation."¹¹² The height of the passes constituted a formidable objection, and the fact that the rivers running in opposite directions rose at these passes indicated that they were not the lowest points in the range.¹¹³

Sometime before this Benton had engaged in a controversy with Senator Gwin of California regarding the char-

112. Col. Fremont's Explorations, Amer. R. R. Jour. vol. 27, p. 402.

113. Henry V. Poor: Pacific R. R., Amer. R. R. Jour. vol. 27, p. 341.

acter of Walker's Pass. The latter had read in the Senate letters from two army officers engaged in one of the Pacific Railroad expeditions.¹¹⁴ They declared that the Pass was of "no account at all" "almost out of the question" and "badly situated." Benton immediately replied in a public letter in which he included Fremont's description of the pass as an excellent one.¹¹⁵ Senator Gwin in his reply pointed out that Lieut. Beale, who "under Colonel Benton's auspices went out upon his favorite route," was forced to abandon the route traced out by Benton. Senator Gwin then enlarged upon the obstacles to constructing a railroad upon Benton's route, particularly through Coochetopa Pass which was four thousand feet higher than South Pass¹¹⁶.

In a letter to Senator Dodge, in 1853, Benton said that he would never favor a project for a road, which mixed public and private means. It must be built entirely by the government or by a joint stock company. He preferred the former, but if that were impossible, he would be for the private enterprise.¹¹⁷

In the winter of 1854-1855, Benton delivered lectures in the principal eastern cities, among them Balti-

114. Cong. Globe, 33 Cong. 1 Sess. p. 29.

115. Nat'l Intelligencer, Dec. 15, 1853.

116. Ibid, Dec. 20, 1853.

117. Pelzer: Augustus Caesar Dodge, pp. 314-316.

more¹¹⁸, New York¹²⁰, Boston¹¹⁹ and Providence¹²¹. His subject was the "Geography of the Country between Missouri and California, with the particular object to show its adaptation to settlement and the construction of a railroad." Benton had by this time relinquished all hope of having the road built by the government, and he wanted to interest men of wealth and power in it. A company could then be formed asking congress for the right of way only. He estimated cost of building the road at \$30-000,000, about \$20,000 a mile for the thirteen hundred miles of the road. He secured a number of names, but the scheme came to nothing.

Benton opposed the Gadsden purchase, one of the features of which was the acquisition of territory for a railroad. His argument was that it was a needless expense for the United States had many better routes within her own borders, especially a national one through Coochetopa Pass and a sectional one corresponding with the center of

118. Nat'l Intelligencer, Dec. 7, 1854. Ibid, Jan. 1, 1855.

119. Discourse of Mr. Benton of Miss. before the Boston Mercantile Library Assoc., Washington, 1854.

120. Nat'l Intelligencer, Dec. 23, 1854.

121. Ibid, Dec. 25, 1854.

the Southern States. He declared, upon the authority of Kit Carson, that the country through which the road would pass was "so utterly desolate, desert, and Godforsaken that - a wolf could not make his living upon it." Furthermore the route was a thousand miles out of the way to San Francisco, and on the borders of the country where it would be inaccessible and hard to protect. He suspected that the real motive was to build up the city of New San Diego, far to the south, and benefit a company of speculators¹²², a suspicion which proved to be correct.

Practically Benton's last words on a Pacific Railroad concerned the Gadsden purchase. In 1857, he finished his examination of the Dred Scot decision. He was then suffering from the disease which shortly afterward caused his death, and was forced to bring the paper to a close sooner than he had intended. However, he issued a warning to the people of the United States that the negotiation with Mexico, which was still kept secret, was connected with a scheme to bring about a separation between the free and slave states. Gadsden, he declared, was authorized to give fifty million dollars for a broadside of Mexico, with a port on the Gulf of California, and a railway to it to suit the South after the separa-

122. Speech on the Mexican Treaty, Cong. Globe 33 Cong. 1 Sess., pp. 1031-1037.

tion. He felt that all of the schemes for a Southern Pacific had this same end in view.¹²³

123. Benton: Examination of the Dred Scot Case, p. 193

CHAPTER V.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act.

A phase of the Kansas-Nebraska struggle which has been overlooked until recent years is the relation between it and the agitation for a Pacific Railroad. There is no doubt that the railroad had more influence than any other one factor upon the struggle over the organization of the territory.

Senator Stephen A. Douglas was the leading supporter of the Kansas Nebraska bill. He had early shown his interest in the construction of a railroad to the Pacific. Being a senator from Illinois, his position was a rather trying one. The people of the Southern part of his state favored a route which would make St. Louis the eastern terminus, for the benefit to that part of the state would be much greater. On the other hand, the rest of the state favored a northern route, and a Chicago terminus. Douglas favored the latter, but could not advocate it openly for fear of losing the support of the southern section of the state. In national affairs, also, he was hampered because he would lose southern support if he openly worked for a northern route.¹²⁴ As a result, the real motives behind the Kansas-Nebraska bill were carefully hidden, and

124. Hodder: The Kansas-Nebraska Act, p. 85.

it was fifty years after its passage that they came to light.

As early as 1845, Douglas proposed a grant of land to several of the states to aid in constructing a railroad from Lake Erie to the Missouri river, by way of Chicago. At the same time, he prepared a bill to organize the territories of Nebraska and Oregon and to reserve alternate sections of land for forty miles on each side of a line of railroad from the Missouri river to the Pacific in the territory of Oregon, ~~or~~ the Bay of San Francisco in case California should be annexed in time.¹²⁵

In 1848, Douglas introduced bills for the organization of Nebraska territory but did not secure their passage.

The people of Iowa as well as those of Illinois favored a northern route for the Pacific Railroad. The starting point most favored was Council Bluffs.¹²⁶ As a result, Senator Dodge of Iowa was Douglas's strongest supporter in the Kansas-Nebraska debate.

Benton also favored the speedy organization of the western country. In his "buffalo trails" speech in 1850, one argument for his route was that it would "accomodate--

125. Donaldson: Public Domain, pp. 265-266.

126. Connelley: Provisional Government, p. 32.

the valuable territories which may soon be formed on the Kansas and the Arkansas."¹²⁷ The principal reason for his interest in the territorial organization was to secure a central route for the Pacific Railroad, although many asserted that he wanted to be senator from Nebraska when it should become a state.¹²⁸

The Wyandot Indians, a civilized tribe living near the mouth of the Kansas river, were very anxious for the territory to be organized, so that they could dispose of their lands to the best advantage to the people who were sure to come into the territory. During the first session of the thirty-second congress, they petitioned Congress for a territorial government in the Territory of Nebraska. This proving unavailing, they decided to elect a delegate to present their views to that body at its last session.¹²⁹

A. Guthrie was elected and went to Washington.¹³⁰ While on the way, he wrote to William Walker, one of the leaders of the Wyandots; "I called to see Colonel Benton, but he had gone to Washington, that is fortunate for he

127. Cong. Globe, 31 Cong., 2 Sess., p. 56.

128. Connelley: Provisional Government, p. 32.

129. Connelley: Provisional Government, p. 24.

130. Ibid, pp. 26, 29.

is our friend and can do us great service."¹³¹ After reaching Washington, he wrote that he had interviewed Willard P. Hall, of St. Joseph, Missouri, and that the latter had prepared a bill which he would introduce the next week.¹³²

December 13, 1852, Hall who was a Benton Democrat,¹³³ introduced a bill to organize the Territory of the Platte.¹³⁴ It was referred to the Committee on Territories of which Richardson of Illinois was chairman. He was a supporter of Douglas, and the latter, upon his election to the Senate, had turned over to Richardson the chairmanship of the House committee on Territories, which he had held.¹³⁵ Richardson reported the bill with the name changed to Nebraska.¹³⁶

In the debate upon the bill which centered on the question of Indian rights, the underlying influence of the Pacific Railroad comes to the surface occasionally, especially in the speeches of Hall and Richardson, repre-

131. Ibid, pp. 76-77.

132. Ibid, p. 78.

133. Johnson: Stephen A. Douglas, p. 223
Goodspeed: The Province and the States, IV, 113.

134. Cong. Globe, 32 Cong., 2 Sess., p. 47.

135. Hodder: The Kansas-Nebraska Act, p. 76.

136. Feb. 2, 1853, Cong. Globe, 32 Cong., 2 Sess., p. 474.

sentatives of the sections most interested.

On the last day of the debate Hall said: "If the gentleman (Howard of Texas) can convince this house and the country that the Territory of Nebraska shall not be organized at this session or any future session of Congress: if the people of Texas can prevail upon the government of the United States to drive the Indians of Texas, the Camanches and other wild tribes, into the territory of Nebraska, it may have the effect of rendering your overland routes from Missouri and Iowa to Oregon and California so dangerous that the tide of emigration will have to pass through Texas - an object which Texas has sought to accomplish for many years past.

"In addition to that, if in the course of time a great railroad should be found necessary from this part of the continent to the shores of the Pacific, and the doctrine prevail that all of the territory west of the Missouri is to be a wilderness from this day henceforth and forever, Texas being settled, the people of this country will have no alternative but to make the Pacific road terminate at Galveston or some other point in Texas."¹³⁷

Later he said: "Why, everybody is talking about a railroad to the Pacific Ocean. In the name of God, how is

the railroad to be made if you will never let people live on the lands through which the road passes? Are you going to construct a road through the Indian Territory at an expense of \$200,000,000, and say that no one shall live upon the land through which it passes?"¹³⁸

Richardson, on the same day said: "He (Howard) is willing to treat with the Indians, to go through that slow process and in the meantime all the great objects of the establishment of a territorial government will be lost, and emigration to the Pacific will be driven to another portion of the Union from the route which it now follows."¹³⁹

The bill passed the House by a large majority.¹⁴⁰ Douglas attempted to get it before the Senate, but it was tabled on the last day of the session.¹⁴¹

The following summer, a convention of the Wyandots held in interest of the central route, and led by Benton Democrats, organized a provisional government for Nebraska Territory.¹⁴² William Gilpin was present and addressed the meeting.¹⁴³ Resolutions were adopted endorsing

138. Ibid, p. 560

139. Ibid, p. 563

140. 98 to 43, Feb. 10, 1853. Ibid, p. 564.

141. March 3, 1853. Ibid, p. 1117.

142. Connelley: Provisional Government, p. 32.

143. Ibid, p. 34, note 5.

Benton's plan for a railroad to the Pacific, and asking for the organization of Nebraska Territory at the earliest possible moment. The last resolution adopted was as follows: "Resolved that the people of Nebraska cherish a profound sense of obligation to the Honorable Thomas H. Benton and to the Honorable Willard P. Hall of Missouri for their generous and patriotic exertions in support of the rights and interests of our territory; and that we hereby express to them our grateful acknowledgment."¹⁴⁴ Mr. Connelley points out that this shows without doubt who was behind the movement.

December 14, 1853, Senator Dodge introduced in the Senate a bill to organize the territory of Nebraska. It was referred to the Committee on Territories of which Douglas was chairman.¹⁴⁵ Douglas reported the bill January 4.¹⁴⁶ In the bill, as reported by Douglas, was a provision that the states formed from the territory should be admitted with or without slavery as their constitutions should specify. The debate on the bill centered, therefore, upon the slavery question.

January 19, the Appeal of the Independent Democrats in Congress to the people of the United States was issued,¹⁴⁷

144. Ibid, pp. 43-46.

145. Cong. Globe, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., p. 49.

146. Ibid, p. 115.

147. Ibid, pp. 281-282.

and contained the following paragraph regarding the Pacific Railroad:

"What will be the effect of this measure, should it unhappily become a law, upon the proposed Pacific railroad? We have already said that two of the principal routes, the northern and central traverse this Territory. If slavery be allowed there, the settlement and cultivation of the country must be greatly retarded. Inducements to the immigration of free laborers will be almost destroyed. The enhanced cost of construction and the diminished expectation of profitable returns, will present almost insuperable obstacles to building the road at all; while even if made, the difficulty and expense of keeping it up in a country from which the intelligent and energetic masses will be virtually excluded, will greatly impair its usefulness and value."

In the meantime, two delegates from Nebraska appeared in Congress. The convention controlled by Benton Democrats had nominated Guthrie for re-election, expecting no opposition. However, the other Missouri faction led by Atchison nominated Rev. Thomas Johnson, and he was elected.¹⁴⁸ The people of Iowa, thinking this would give the Missouri route undue weight in Congress, transported a number of voters

148. Connelley: Provisional Government, pp. 37-39.

across the river to Belview where another election was held. Hadley D. Johnson was elected.¹⁴⁹ He went immediately to Washington, but found that Thomas Johnson, representing the Missouri faction had preceded him. The latter was not disposed to give up his seat. Hadley D. Johnson said: "I told him there was no occasion for a contest, between us for a seat to which neither of us had a claim; that I came there to suggest and work for the organization of two territories instead of one; that if he saw proper to second my efforts, I believed we could succeed in the object for which we each had come."¹⁵⁰ He was introduced to Douglas by Senator Dodge, who advocated his plan. He explained the plan to Douglas and asked him to adopt it.¹⁵¹

Johnson may have exaggerated the part which he played in the division of the territory. At any rate, January 22, Douglas called upon President Pierce and Secretary of War Davis, and secured their support for a new bill provid-

149. Johnson, Hadley D.: How the Kansas Nebraska Line was Established. Trans. of Neb.St.Hist. Soc. vol. II, p. 86.

150. Ibid, p. 88.

151. Ibid, p. 88.

ing for two territories instead of one.¹⁵²

Consequently, the next day Douglas introduced a substitute for the Nebraska bill, repealing the Missouri Compromise and dividing the territory. This was the famous Kansas-Nebraska bill. Douglas explained the division upon the ground that the two delegates had petitioned for it and said further: "Upon consultation with the delegates from Iowa, I find that they think that their local interests, as well as the interests of the Territory require that the Territory of Nebraska should be divided into two territories... So far as I have been able to consult the Missouri delegation, they are of the same opinion."¹⁵³

The debate continued for over a month, centering upon the slavery question and the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. Senator Dodge was one of the most ardent supporters of the bill. His position was different from that of Douglas and he could, without fear of losing the support of his state, mention the real motive behind his advocacy. In his speech in favor of it he said: "The passage of the bill before us will, in my judgment, confer great benefits upon the nation, the West, and especially upon the state which I represent. The settlement and occupation of Nebraska will ac-

152. Johnson: Stephen A. Douglas, p. 238.

153. Cong. Globe, 33 Cong. 1 Sess., pp. 221-222.

comply for us what the acquisition and peopling of Iowa did for Illinois. Originally I favored the organization of one Territory; but representations from our constituents, and a more critical examination of the subject - having an eye to the systems of internal improvement which must be adopted by the people of Kansas and Nebraska to develop their resources, satisfied my colleague.....and myself that the great interests of the whole country, and especially of our state, demand that we should support the proposition for the establishment of two territories; otherwise the seat of government and leading thoroughfares must have fallen south of Iowa."¹⁵⁴

It is thus clear that the supporters of the bill felt that two territories would give the northern route an advantage, or at least an equal opportunity with the central route; while, if there were only one territory, the central route would be the logical one.¹⁵⁵ Naturally Douglas and Dodge were heartily in favor of the bill for this reason.

The bill finally passed the Senate March 4, by a vote of 37 to 14.¹⁵⁶

154. Cong. Globe, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., App. p. 382.

155. Johnson: Stephen A. Douglas p. 239.

156. Cong. Globe, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., p. 532.

Benton was at this time in the House. His position when the bill came before that body was exceedingly difficult. He and his supporters had been working for the organization of the territory for several years and the majority of his constituents favored it. On the other hand, it practically meant the death of his pet railroad scheme. The railroad considerations gained the ascendancy, and he strongly opposed the bill. He spoke twice against it, never once mentioning his real motive, but concentrating his argument upon the repeal of the Missouri Compromise.¹⁵⁷

The bill passed the House by a majority of 13,¹⁵⁸ and was signed by the President.

At the next session of Congress, Representative Mace of Indiana introduced a bill which meant a repeal of the clause in the Kansas-Nebraska Act which abolished the Missouri Compromise. Benton, who could not be present, left a speech against the bill which was read by one of his colleagues. He explains his opposition on the ground that agitation of the repeal could "only disquiet the settlers in Kansas and perhaps retard its population; and with me the rapid settlement of the territory is an over ruling

157. April 20, 1854, Cong. Globe, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., App. pp. 557-561. May 22, Cong. Globe, 33 Cong., 33 Sess., pp. 1232, 1233.

158. 113 to 100, Cong. Globe, 33 Cong., 1 Sess. p. 1254.

consideration as promoting the construction of the central railroad to the Pacific."¹⁵⁹

This seems to me to prove without doubt that the real motive for his opposition to the original Kansas-Nebraska bill was the effect it would have upon his railroad project. It was less than a year after the passage of the bill that this bill to repeal the very part to which he had objected was proposed. He did not hesitate to oppose it, and upon railroad grounds, thus showing that this was the paramount consideration. It would be interesting to know what would have been his attitude if the bill had proposed to reunite the two territories.

It was only after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill that Douglas was ready and able to get his railroad bill before Congress. The bill provided for three roads, northern, Central and Southern. As means for constructing them a quantity of public land, equal to alternate sections for twelve miles on each side of the proposed roads, was to be set aside.¹⁶⁰

The House had already a railroad bill under consideration. Benton was strongly opposed to it; and spoke at length against it on January 16, 1855¹⁶¹. He declared that

159. Cong. Globe, 33 Cong., 2 Sess. p. 79.

160. Cong. Globe, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., (1854-55) p. 281.

161. Cong. Globe, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., App. pp. 73-82.

the road must be withdrawn from legislative authority, and from political and sectional interests, and left to a company of business men, where business interests alone would prevail. He again declared in favor of the central route as the most national, and the most favorable one for the construction of the road. Still clinging to the idea of Asiatic trade, he said: "Make the road; and in it's making make America the thoroughfare of Oriental commerce, throw back the Cape and the Horn routes to what Tyre became when, Alexandria was founded and what Alexandria became when the Cape of Good Hope was doubled."

On the Same day, Representative Dunlap of Louisiana moved to substitute the Douglas bill for the House bill.¹⁶² Benton also spoke against this bill. He declared that both the northern and southern roads might terminate in the wilderness, for according to the bill they were to be carried to the navigable waters of the Pacific Ocean. Only the central route, which was to go to San Francisco Bay, would have proper junctions at both ends. He declared this would be an invasion of state rights, which were "something beside a name" to him. His own plan was for a railroad in the direction of San Francisco, but not into the State.¹⁶³

On January 18, Davis of Indiana moved the substitution of one road from the western boundary of Missouri or Iowa¹⁶⁴

162. Cong. Globe, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., p. 281.

163. Ibid, p. 335.

164. Ibid, p. 316.

and in this form the bill passed the House four days later¹⁶⁵. However, on the same day, January 22, a motion to reconsider was passed, and the bill was recommitted¹⁶⁶.

The next day, a motion to lay on the table the motion to recommit passed 95 to 94, largely due to the efforts of Benton.¹⁶⁷ It was never taken up again in the House, although it passed the Senate nearly a month later.

165. Ibid, p. 355.

166. Ibid, p. 356.

167, Ibid, p. 368.

Chapter VI.

Conclusion.

Benton was defeated for re-election to the House in 1854 by Louis M. Kendrie. It was during his last session that the Douglas railroad bill was before the House. In 1856, he ran as an Independent Democrat for Governor of Missouri, but was defeated by a large majority. From that time, he did not take an active part in politics, but devoted his time to his literary work, particularly to the completion of the "Abridgment of the Debates of Congress," a sixteen volume work of much merit.

It has been shown that Benton's interest in Western affairs began even before he was sent to the Senate, and continued through his last session in Congress. In all of the debates upon subjects of this character, his part was an active and important one.

His first papers upon communication with the West, all favored the South Pass as the best means of crossing the Rocky Mountains. He maintained this view until the Fremont expeditions found other passes farther south. He also gives the acquisition of California and New Mexico as an additional reason for his change of route. However, the influence of Fremont seems more important, as it was upon the results of his explorations that Benton depended for information regarding the geography of the

country. An additional reason for his shifting view was the realization that St. Louis would not be the logical Eastern terminus of a road through South Pass. Benton's local interest was a compelling motive throughout his whole political career.

At the beginning of railroad agitation, Benton opposed them, largely because of his prejudice in favor of water transportation. However, when he came to realize the advantages of railroads, he was a strong advocate of their extension.

His opposition to the Whitney measure can best be explained by his local feeling, and the fact that St. Louis would not be the terminus of the road. He thought that the government ought to build the road instead of making large grants of land to private companies also influenced him.

Benton's own bills for a central highway, and railroad were all for a straight road between St. Louis and San Francisco, with branches to other points. The roads were to be built by the government, and the use of the railroads let for terms of years to private companies. It was only after he saw that it would be impossible to have the road built by the government that he relinquished the idea, and in 1853 set about securing a company to take up the work. However, the route which he advo-

cated at this time was essentially the same as the one which he had favored at the time of his first bill in 1849.

His opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska bill was plainly due to railroad considerations, and not as he maintained, because he opposed the repeal of the Missouri compromise. The railroad idea was uppermost in the minds of both Benton and Douglas, the one opposing a division of the territory because it meant the death of his favorite central route; and the other using every means to secure such division, because it would give the northern route a better chance, and bring the railroad through his own state. Douglas was the victor in this, but Benton's turn came when he was able to secure the defeat of the railroad bill, which Douglas introduced after the Kansas-Nebraska bill had become a law.

Benton's victory on the railroad question was a purely negative one; for while he was able to defeat the Whitney and Douglas plans, he never secured the passage of his own bill.

Benton died in 1858, a defeated and disappointed man. He had lost the support of his own party in Missouri, had been defeated several times for office, and the railroad for which he had labored for so many years had failed to become a fact. The defects in his character were many,

but there were also many good points. He was patriotic, and devoted to the interests of his state and of the country as a whole, as his career in the legislative body of the Federal government clearly shows. Although his projects often failed, he was one of the greatest legislators of his time, and deserves to rank with the great men of the United States, a man of whom both the nation and the state of Missouri may well be proud.

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